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Latin America and Antarctica: New Approaches to Humanities and Social Science Scholarship

Adrian Howkins and Cristian Lorenzo

Latin America is a region with extensive connections to Antarctica. Argentina and Chile are claimant nations, and both are original signatories of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty.¹ Largely as a result of Argentine and Chilean participation in its negotiation, Spanish is one of the four official languages of the Antarctic Treaty. Since 2004, the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat has been located in Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires. Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay have all become consultative members of the Antarctic Treaty through conducting science in Antarctica and contributing to the Antarctic community, and Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, and Venezuela are non-consultative members. All six Latin American consultative members are also members of the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP), and all six belong to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR).² Although Ecuador is not a signatory of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the other five Latin American consultative members have signed up to this convention, as has Panama.³ According to COMNAP, there were 27 Latin American stations in Antarctica in 2017 (Argentina with 13, Chile with 9, Uruguay with 2, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru all with 1). The rapidly expanding Antarctic tourist industry is centred in the gateway cities of Ushuaia (Argentina) and Punta Arenas (Chile).⁴ More intangibly, a strong Antarctic consciousness can be found in some of the countries of Latin America, especially in the claimant states of Chile and Argentina.⁵

Latin America is a region of rich natural resources, tremendous linguistic and cultural diversity, and a wide range of ecosystems. Far from being monolithic, the historical and cultural reality of Latin America has been shaped by diversity as well as unity.⁶ A case could be made that thinking about the connections to Antarctica potentially expands and further complicates our understanding of the region. If we take seriously the sovereignty claims of Argentina and Chile, for example, the geographical boundaries of Latin America might be seen as extending all the way to the South Pole. The value of such an exercise is not so much to propose a new definition of the territorial extent of Latin America, but rather to highlight the reciprocity of Latin American relations with the Antarctic continent: Latin Americans have shaped the history of Antarctica at the same time as Antarctica has influenced the history of Latin America.

Despite these extensive connections, and the reciprocity in the history, Latin America as a region has been underrepresented in English-language Antarctic social science and humanities scholarship. While *The Polar Journal*, for example, has been extremely

¹ For information about the history of the Antarctic Treaty see www.ats.aq

² The COMNAP website is www.comnap.aq; the SCAR website is www.scar.org.

³ The CCAMLR website is ccamlr.org

⁴ For data on the Antarctic tourist industry see the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators website at www.iaato.org

⁵ For a short overview of the history of Latin America and Antarctica, see Howkins, 'Latin America and Antarctica'.

⁶ Roig, *Teoría Y Crítica Del Pensamiento Latinoamericano*, 19.

successful in promoting diversity in polar scholarship, there remain relatively few publications from authors at Latin American institutions (especially in proportion to the contribution made by Latin American states to Antarctic science, logistics, politics, and cultural production).⁷ Such a situation is not unique to *The Polar Journal*, and is repeated across English-language books and journals related to social sciences and humanities in Antarctica. No criticism is intended in highlighting the relative underrepresentation of Latin America in the English Language polar humanities and social science scholarship, but the situation does reveal a clear opportunity for Latin American scholars to reach a wider audience.

It is worth reflecting on the possible causes of the underrepresentation of Latin American Antarctic social science and humanities scholarship. Perhaps the most obvious explanation is linguistic. In a reflection of the broader development of intellectual networks in the region and beyond, there is a robust scholarly community in Latin America studying Antarctica from social science and humanities perspectives, especially in history.⁸ Much of this work, understandably, is published in Spanish and Portuguese rather than English.⁹ Scholarly trends and approaches to Antarctic Studies in Latin America do not always match those of Anglophone academia: the 'heroic era' of Antarctic exploration, for example, looks quite different when viewed from Argentina or Chile than from Britain, Norway, or Australia.¹⁰ As a result of these differences, scholarship that is deemed as 'cutting edge' in Chile, Brazil, or Argentina, may not always be considered as such by the English-speaking editors and reviewers of the leading international journals as measured by impact factor. Another likely cause of the under-representation of Latin America in polar studies books and journals is the fact that Latin America has relatively few connections with the Arctic. When we began work on this volume, we explored the possibility of including something on Latin America and the Arctic, but we couldn't find anyone with a paper to publish on on this topic. (This is potentially a fruitful area of research given the importance of the Arctic for Global Change scholarship).

Alongside the most obvious causes of the underrepresentation of Latin America in the English language Antarctic scholarship, it is also important to recognize structural constraints on Latin American Antarctic scholarship that reflect global inequalities.¹¹

⁷ As an example of this diversity, it is interesting to note, for example, that the top 11 institutions represented in *The Polar Journal* in terms of the affiliation of authors published in the journal, are located in 8 different countries.

⁸ For a discussion of the development of Latin American intellectual networks, see Devés-Valdés, *Redes Intelectuales En América Latina*.

⁹ In the case of those addressing topics related to Antarctica, since the 90s, Antarctic historians had been working in the framework of the Meetings of Latin American Antarctic Historians, attending to different meetings. See, for example, <http://www.antarkos.org.uy/EHAL/index.htm>. Some interesting examples of Latin American social science and humanities works on Antarctica published in Spanish and Portuguese include Colacrai, 'Continuidades Y Cambios En La Política Antártica Argentina'; Santos, *O Pensamento Político-Jurídico e o Brasil Na Antártida*; Zarankin and Senatore, *Historias de Un Pasado En Blanco: Arqueología Histórica Antártica*; Fontana, *La Pugna Antártica, El Conflicto Por El Sexto Continente : 1939-1959*; Leon Woppke and Jara Fernández, *Pensamiento Antartico Chileno: Referencias Bibliograficas*.

¹⁰ One of the most interesting discussions of a Latin American perspective on the heroic era can be found in Ursula Le Guinn's short story 'Sur'. Le Guin, 'Sur'.

¹¹ See, for example, <https://wid.world/>

Impressive scholarly production on Antarctica has occurred in Latin America despite circumstances that can frequently be quite challenging. Economic problems can make it more difficult to spend money on academic research in general and humanities and social science research in particular, which are often seen as less valuable than the hard and applied sciences.¹² Within structure of the Antarctic Treaty System, there is a clear privileging of scientific research, which might be seen as exacerbating the difficulties of doing humanities and social in countries where funding is more constrained.¹³ Economic inequalities can limit institutional access to journals, reduce opportunities to attend international conferences, and decrease access to foreign language education. Only 4% of institutional subscriptions to *The Polar Journal*, for example, are from institutions based in Latin America.¹⁴ Within the Antarctic humanities, scholars based in Europe, North America and Australia enjoy structural advantages over colleagues in other parts of the world that often go unacknowledged. There is what the theorist Walter Mignolo has called a 'geopolitics of knowledge' within humanities and social science scholarship on Antarctica.¹⁵ Further work on the disparities of Antarctic knowledge production could be a useful field of research, not only to consider the position of Latin America but also to think about other underrepresented regions of the world. Recognising that disparities exist is an important first step in starting to address them.

In the context of both these scholarly inequalities and the extensive connections between Latin America and Antarctica, the decision to hold the 2019 meeting of the SCAR Humanities and Social Science (HASS) group in Ushuaia to facilitate greater participation by Latin American scholars represents a move in the right direction. Building on the momentum generated by the Ushuaia conference, this special volume aims to showcase Latin American scholarship on Antarctica to an English-language audience. Most of the articles in this volume were originally presented as papers at this conference. While it was certainly not a requirement for inclusion in this special volume, the way the submission and review process has turned out means that all of the lead-authors are Latin American scholars. Although the act of writing in English or translating into English inevitably changes the nature of the scholarly enterprise, our aim with this special volume is to offer an insight into ways that Latin American humanities scholars and social scientist are thinking about Antarctica at this particular moment in time, and thereby make a contribution to correcting the underrepresentation of Latin American Antarctic scholarship in the English-language literature.

¹² A Scimago search powered by SCOPUS, demonstrates that Latin American contributions in both the social sciences and arts and humanities have increased significantly between 1996 and 2018. In 1996 the top four countries on the list of indexed social science publications in Latin America (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile) between them produced 450 social science publications [<https://www.scimagojr.com/countryrank.php?area=3300®ion=Latin%20America&year=1996>]. In 2018 the same four countries between them produced 12,533 publications [<https://www.scimagojr.com/countryrank.php?area=3300®ion=Latin%20America&year=2018>]. In arts and humanities the corresponding figures for the same four countries were 218 for 1996 and 4632 in 2018 [<https://www.scimagojr.com/countryrank.php?area=1200®ion=Latin%20America&year=1996>; <https://www.scimagojr.com/countryrank.php?area=1200®ion=Latin%20America&year=2018>]. As well as demonstrating a major increase in scholarly production, these figures also suggest a growing international visibility.

¹³ Howkins, 'Emerging from the Shadow of Science: Challenges and Opportunities for Antarctic History'.

¹⁴ E mail correspondence with *The Polar Journal*, October 2019.

¹⁵ Mignolo, 'Introducción', 25.

Despite the fact that all of the first authors in this volume have direct Latin American connections, we stop short of suggesting that this volume offers a 'Latin American perspective' on Antarctic scholarship. In the past – especially during periods of military dictatorship – it may have been possible to make a number of generalizations about Latin American humanities and social science scholarship on Antarctica: much of it was produced by government officials; there were frequently strong nationalistic motivations; and there was often a lot of focus on geopolitics.¹⁶ While these trends have not disappeared entirely, in the democratic states of contemporary Latin America there is today a much greater diversity to the scholarly methods and approaches within Antarctic Studies.¹⁷ As exemplified by the essays in this volume – which represent different nationalities, different disciplinary backgrounds, and different ways of thinking about Antarctica – this diversity means that there is no singular Latin American way of looking at Antarctica from the humanities and social sciences, any more than there is a singular European, North American, or Australasian way of approaching Antarctic Studies.

While it makes little sense to look for a single Latin American perspective, the context in which scholarship is produced does matter, and this has been a long-standing theme in Latin American humanities and social science scholarship. In exploring the concept of the 'universal situated,' for example, the Argentine philosopher Mario Casalla, notes that "every reflexion, every discourse, every assessment of the real is situated..."¹⁸ There is much for the wider Antarctic Studies community to learn from the connections between knowledge and place in Latin American Antarctic scholarship. In a similar way that Latin American scholars have contributed to the field of political economy through Dependency Theory, for example, or the field of theology through Liberation Theology, the different social, economic, and political contexts in which knowledge is produced in Latin America raises the possibility of sometimes quite radically different approaches to Antarctic scholarship. In the past this distinctive contribution may have been characterised by an emphasis on geopolitics, but today it is more likely to take the form of an honesty about political motivations for Antarctic research, an analysis of relative power dynamics, or a consideration of cultural connections. For scholars working outside Latin America, looking at Antarctica from different perspectives can encourage us all to challenge our assumptions and think about the 'silences' in our own scholarly approaches.¹⁹

¹⁶ See, for example, Child, *Antarctica and South American Geopolitics : Frozen Lebensraum*; Dodds, *Geopolitics in Antarctica: Views from the Southern Oceanic Rim*.

¹⁷ See, for example, Devés-Valdés, *El pensamiento latinoamericano en el siglo XX*, 21. In relation to broader scholarly networks, Devés Valdés identifies three factors to explain intellectual changes over the course of the twentieth century: the emergence of a new generation of scholars, new international ideas, and the occurrence of sudden events that have a tremendous impact on the society.

¹⁸ Casalla, 'El Estatuto de La Universalidad En La Filosofía Latinoamericana: Lo Universal-Situado', 55. For other discussions of situated scholarship in Latin America see for example Auat, *Hacia Una Filosofía Política Situada*; Seitz, 'Balance de las principales capacidades, compromisos y conflictos en materia de integración y recursos naturales de los países del MERCOSUR'.

¹⁹ Important work on the silences in Antarctic history has been done by Andrés Zarankin and Ximena Senatore and their research groups. See, for example, Zarankin and Senatore, *Historias de Un Pasado En Blanco: Arqueología Histórica Antártica*.

Acknowledging the new insights that Latin American scholarship can bring to Antarctic Studies raises an interesting question about broader trends. The SCAR HASS conference in Ushuaia might be seen as being representative of the growing international integration of the study of Antarctica by the humanities and social sciences, which the SCAR HASS group and the creation of *The Polar Journal* have both done much to promote.²⁰ Will such integration lead to increasing homogeneity and less regional distinctiveness in Antarctic Studies? Such outcomes are certainly possible, and we should certainly be wary of a bland middle way where all the scholarship starts to look the same. But international interactions also have the potential to widen and deepen our understanding of Antarctica. The essays in this volume point towards an ever-expanding diversity within Antarctic scholarship as established themes are considered through new case studies, as new questions emerge from different social, political, and economic contexts, and as different methods and approaches come together in increasingly innovative ways. As noted by the Argentine philosopher Carlos Alemián, difference is creative and there is an urgency to think differently.²¹

The volume begins with an article by Luis Valentín Ferrada on 'Latin America and the Antarctic Treaty System as a Legal Regime.' This article provides a useful legal and historical summary of Latin American connections to Antarctica. Ignacio Cardone and Pablo Fontana's 'Latin American Contributions to the Creation of the Antarctic Regime' goes back a little further in time to look at the important roles played by Argentina and Chile in the origins of the Antarctic Treaty. Alongside the political connections to Antarctica, there are also important literary connections between Latin America and Antarctica, which are explored in Pablo Wainschenker and Elizabeth Leane's 'The "Alien" Next Door: Antarctica in South American Fiction.' Continuing the cultural theme and demonstrating strong overlaps with social and political history, Pablo Fontana's '*Between the ice of the Orkney Islands*: shooting the arise of the overwintering Antarctic tradition' examines an early Argentine documentary filmed in Antarctica. Nelson Llanos' 'Housewives at the end of the world: Chilean women living in Antarctica, 1984-1986' considers an important period in Chile's engagement with Antarctica from a gender history perspective. Bringing the special volume up to the present, Mariano Novas presents an analysis of bioprospecting in Antarctica in 'Antarctic Governance of Biological Resources: The Argentine White Genome Project' and Alejandro Sanchez offers an overview of developments in Latin America's maritime capacity in Antarctica in his opinion piece 'How are we getting there? The Present and Future of South America's Antarctic Fleet.' Taken together, the articles in this special volume offer a broad selection of some of the most exciting humanities and social science scholarship that is being done on Antarctica in Latin America today.

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²⁰ See, for example, Nielsen and Philpott, 'Depths and Surfaces'. Another recent work that brings together Antarctic scholars from around the world is Roberts et al., *Antarctica and the Humanities*.

²¹ Alemián, *El Imperio de La Razón y El Silencio de La Diferencia*.

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